

In the Claims:

Please cancel Claims 1-17 and replace them with the following new Claims 18-40:

18. (New) A method for using a distributed computer network to facilitate collaboration between clients working on a common project, wherein the distributed computer network comprises client computers and a central database, said method comprising the steps of:

publishing project specific data in a plurality of project data fields to the central database;

assigning a global unique identifier to each project data field of the plurality of project data fields;

mapping the global unique identifier for each project data field to an associated local data field for the project specific data maintained in the client computers; and

exchanging information related to the common project between the client computers, wherein the exchanged information is matched to the associated local data field maintained in the client computers based upon each global unique identifier.

19. (New) A method according to Claim 18, wherein said exchanging step comprises the steps of:

selecting information to exchange between a first client computer and a second client computer, wherein the information comprises a plurality of local data fields maintained in the first client computer, and wherein each local data field in the first client computer is associated with a respective global unique identifier; and

transmitting the information from the first client computer to the second client computer, wherein the transmitted information is matched to a corresponding local data field maintained in the second client computer based upon the respective global unique identifier associated with each local data field maintained in the first client computer.

20. (New) A method according to Claim 19, further comprising the step of obtaining from the central database addressing information associated with the second client computer, wherein the information is transmitted from the first client computer to the second client computer according to the addressing information.

21. (New) A method according to Claim 18, wherein said exchanging step comprises the steps of:

selecting information to exchange between a first client computer and a second client computer, wherein the information comprises a plurality of local data fields maintained in the first client computer;

determining whether each local data field of the plurality of local data fields maintained in the first client computer is associated with a respective global unique identifier;

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in the event that a global unique identifier is not associated with each local data field, obtaining a global unique identifier for each local data field without an associated global unique identifier;

mapping the global unique identifier obtained in said obtaining step to a respective local data field maintained in the first client computer; and

transmitting the information from the first client computer to the second client computer, wherein each local data field in the transmitted information is matched to a corresponding local data field maintained in the second client computer based upon the respective global unique identifier.

22. (New) A method according to Claim 21, wherein said exchanging step further comprises the steps of:

receiving by the second client computer the information transmitted in said transmitting step, wherein the information comprises a respective global unique identifier associated with each local data field maintained in the first client computer;

determining whether each respective global unique identifier is associated with a local data field maintained in the second client computer; and in the event that a global unique identifier is not associated with a local data field maintained in the second client computer, mapping the respective global unique identifier without an associated local data field maintained in the second client computer to a local data field maintained in the second client computer.

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23. (New) A method according to Claim 18, wherein said exchanging step further comprises exchanging the information without storing the information in the central database.

24. (New) A method according to Claim 18, further comprising the step of storing confidential information for a specific client on a specific client database connected to the central database of the distributed computer network,

wherein the specific client retains ownership of the confidential information stored on the specific client database.

25. (New) A method according to Claim 18, wherein said exchanging step comprises exchanging information related to a plurality of common projects between the client computers.

26. (New) A method according to Claim 18, further comprising the step of storing the global unique identifier for each project data field in the central database.

27. (New) A method according to Claim 18, further comprising the steps of:

sending an invitation from a first client computer that invites a second client to collaborate on the common project; and

responding to the invitation at a second client computer by one of accepting or rejecting the invitation.

28. (New) A method according to Claim 18, wherein said mapping step comprises the steps of:

comparing a particular local data field maintained in particular client computer to a particular project data field published in the central database;

determining if the particular local data field corresponds to the particular project data field based on a result of said comparing step; and

in the event that the particular local data field corresponds to the particular project data field, assigning the global unique identifier associated with the particular project data field to the particular local data field.

29. (New) A method according to Claim 28, further comprising the step of importing the particular project data field and its assigned global unique identifier into the particular client computer, in response to a determination that the particular local data field does not correspond to the particular project data field.

30. (New) A method according to Claim 18, further comprising the step of tracking changes to information exchanged between the client computers to determine whether an old version of the information and a new version of the information exist.

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31. (New) A method according to Claim 30, wherein said tracking step comprises the steps of:

recording tracked changes to the information in a document table, wherein the document table includes data associated with the old version and the new version; and

setting a status in the document table if the old version is outdated.

32. (New) A method according to Claim 31, wherein said recording step comprises the step of associating the old version and the new version with a document history table when the old version and the new version are part of a family of documents, wherein the document history table stores data indicating changes made to each document in the family of documents.

33. (New) A method for using a distributed computer network to facilitate the exchanging of information between clients in the construction industry, wherein the distributed computer network comprises client computers and a central database, said method comprising the steps of:

creating an electronic document in a client computer, the electronic document having a plurality of data fields each containing information to be shared;

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assigning by the central database a global unique identifier to each data field of the plurality of data fields in the electronic document;

storing in the central database each assigned global unique identifier; mapping each assigned global unique identifier to an associated local data field maintained in the client computers; and

exchanging between the client computers the information contained in the electronic document, wherein the exchanged information is matched to the associated local data field maintained in the client computers based upon each assigned global unique identifier.

34. (New) A method according to Claim 33, wherein said mapping step comprises the steps of:

comparing a particular local data field in a particular client computer to a particular data field of the electronic document published in the central database;

determining if the particular local data field corresponds to the particular data field of the electronic document, based on a result of said comparing step; and

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in the event that the particular local data field corresponds to the particular data field of the electronic document, assigning the global unique identifier assigned to the particular data field of the electronic document to the particular local data field.

35. (New) A method according to Claim 34, further comprising the step of importing the particular data field of the electronic document and its assigned global unique identifier into the particular client computer, in response to a determination that the particular local data field does not correspond to the particular data field of the electronic document.

36. (New) A method according to Claim 33, further comprising the step of storing confidential information for a specific client on a specific client database connected to the central database of the distributed computer network, wherein the specific client retains ownership of the confidential information stored on the specific client database.

37. (New) A method according to Claim 33, further comprising the step of tracking changes to information exchanged between the client computers to determine whether an old version of the information and a new version of the information exist.

38. (New) A method according to Claim 37, wherein said tracking step comprises the step of recording tracked changes to the information in a document table, wherein the document table includes data associated with the old version and the new version.

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39. (New) A method according to Claim 38, wherein said tracking step comprises the step of setting a status in the document table if the old version is outdated.

40. (New) A computer system for exchanging information between clients in the construction industry, comprising:

a processing unit for exchanging information between the clients;
a display device coupled to said processing unit for displaying the information; and
a program module providing access to a distributed computer network,
said program module being operable to implement the method of Claim 1.

REMARKS

Upon entry of the present Preliminary Amendment, Claims 18-40 are pending in the present application, with Claims 18, 33, and 40 being independent. Claims 1-17 have been